



Reflection of Nature in R. N. Tagore's Short Stories

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ABSTRACT: Nature remains one of the focal inspirational issues in Rabindranath Tagore's creative journey. Being the nature lover, nature plays a pivotal role in almost all of his literary works; especially in his poems and songs. Although the central themes of Tagore's short stories always occupy the household matters of rural people; viz., controversies among family members regarding property, various individual struggles as well as the societal problems especially of rural areas of Bengal; humorous, scientific thoughts, characters in urban settings, supernatural and fantasy themes and many more, still nature runs consistently in his stories side by side. In his short stories very often nature remains as the background of the story; as a soul mate, a true companion of loneliness, etc. Along with the central themes of the stories, Tagore's concentration remains to draw the natural sceneries of the surroundings. So, in this write up attempt has been made to find out how Tagore's short stories reflects nature as well as what are the main concerns of Tagore to represent nature in various ways. In the stories of Tagore nature is represented in the form of river, trees, flowers, cows, birds, hills, sun, moon, etc. He realised the presence of divinity in all these things and considered to have worth of existence. He considers him as a member among all these things as well as realised the intuitive and spiritual bond between him and nature. In the short stories nature plays the role of a friend, philosopher and guide to mankind. It is also remains the source of joy, peace and tranquility of mind.

Keywords: Nature, inspirational, intuitive, spiritual, tranquility, worth, existence.

I. INTRODUCTION

The 19th century versatile genius, noble laureate, Rabindranath Tagore put his first step as a story writer in 1877 when he was only 16 years old. He started his journey with the story *Bhikharini* (The Beggar Girl, 1877) which appeared for the first time in the literary magazine *Bharati* in the same year. He wrote more than hundred short stories spanning sixty four years of his life, i.e. from 1877 to 1841 which were published in diverse periodicals, and anthologies and are collected in the four volumes of *Galpaguchcha*. His versatile themes of short stories covered the household matters of rural people; viz., controversies among family members regarding property, various individual struggles as well as the societal problems especially of rural areas of Bengal; humorous, scientific thoughts, characters in urban settings, supernatural and fantasy themes and many more. In the words of Bandyopadhyay:

The pictures of our rural urban lives, disintegration of the old joint family, families, family quarrels, conflict in love and affection, conflict between religious superstition and humanistic values and the final triumph of humanism provide a pageant of the entire Bengal life. (Bandyopadhyay, 62).

Along with the central themes of his stories, nature runs consistently in his stories side by side. Very often it has seen that nature remains as the background of the story; sometimes nature stands as a soul mate, as a true companion of loneliness, etc. In his short stories nature is represented in the form of river, trees, flowers, cows, birds, hills, sun, moon, etc. He realized the presence of divinity in all these things and considered to have worth of existence. He considers him as a member among all these things as well as realized the intuitive and spiritual bond between him and nature. In the short stories nature plays the role of a friend, philosopher and guide to mankind. It is also remains the source of joy, peace and tranquility of mind. So, in the present write up attempt has been made to analyse how nature has reflected in his stories. To do this special consideration is given here to these stories; *Post Master*, *Atithi*, *Chuti*, and *Sobha*.

Background of the Reflection of Nature in Tagore's Short Stories

Rabindranath Tagore is considered as a nature poet per excellence. He had immense love and respect for nature from the very inception of life. He inherited these from his father Maharshi Debendranath Tagore, who very often used to travel different places for religious and business purposes. Once Tagore also got chance to accompany his father to Himalayas in 1873. That travel brought to him the golden opportunity to enjoy the open nature directly for the first time. The direct touch of lofty, beautiful natural surroundings of the Himalayas created immense happiness and a sense of togetherness with nature in the tender mind of Tagore. So, from the childhood he had internal inclination to nature. He was out and out a nature lover. He considered nature as a living entity and realised as a real companion from his very childhood. Tagore confessed in his work *Creative Unity* thus:

I remember, when I was a child a row of coconut trees by our garden wall, with their swaying branches beckoned the rising sun on the horizon, gave me companionship as living as I was myself (C.U. P. 8).

Tagore wrote most of his stories during the period of 1891-95, when he took the responsibility of their family estates as a land lord at Shelidah of East Bengal. As a land lord he had to tour widely in many places of rural Bengal with the house boat across the river. During that period Tagore was deeply influenced by his first hand experiences of the lives of rural Bengal. Nirmal Kumar Sidhanta commented thus:

After years of city life he was now in the midst of the bounties of Nature, with plenty of opportunities of admiring natural scenes and surveying the natural panorama of rural life. Living here the poet was impressed on the one hand, by the wide expanse of water and on the other by the unknown human beings who had inhabited the villages for generations and centuries (P. 285). The surrounding natural environment of Rural Bengal had immense impact on Tagore's short stories. He enjoyed much to write stories amidst the serene beauty of nature. Tagore declared in *Chinnapatra* (27th June, 1984) thus:

It is one of the joys of story writing that the people I write about can feel my spare time, night and day, become the companion of my solitary spirit, dispel the narrowness of my closed chamber on a rainy day and in my mind's eye, traverse the radiant landscape of the Padma shore when the sun shine. (The Essential Tagore, 491).

Reflection of Nature in the Stories Postmaster (1891), Subha (1992), Chuti (1892-93) and Atithi (1895).

The *Postmaster*, *Subha*, *Atithi* and *Chuti*, all these four stories were written by Tagore during 1891- 1895, the productive period which was very often considered as the *Sadhana* phase. These periods are termed as productive period because most of the significant literary works were done by him. The significance of these stories is that all were written during the period when he was staying at North Bengal, along with the banks of the river Padma. He gave a true picture of Bengal with all her natural beauties through these stories. Nature plays a specific role in these stories. In these stories of Tagore nature is depicted to fulfill various functions. Being the lyrical poet he could feel the pulse of nature. Due to that the intuitive link between man and nature is clearly reveals in these nature stories. In these stories a true picture of Bengal with all her beauties is present. Tagore used nature to create certain mood of the central characters or the surrounding environments. He showed that human feelings get depth and completeness through nature. Tagore is realistic in the depiction of nature. Sankar Basu in his book *Chekhov and tagore: A Comparative Study of their Short Stories* remarked thus:

In the stories of Tagore nature often, as in real life, is an unconcerned witness of human drama (P. 108).

In 1891 Tagore wrote the story *Postmaster*. It is the story of a young urbane postmaster who was sent to a remote village named after Ulapur for work and a eleven- twelve years old orphan girl named after Ratan who stayed in that village alone. In this story nature occupies a central role from the beginning to the end consistently. At the very beginning of this story nature is presented as a source of creating challenges to the postmaster. The natural setting of the surrounding and the seasonal changes of Ulapur stand as a challenge to the postmaster. Nature is presented here in diverse ways; sometimes as a means to disconnect him with the world of Ulapur and some other times it plays the role of creating the sense of craving to go back to the metropolitan setting of Kolkata (formerly Calcutta). Tagore described the natural setting of his office that "*Ekkhani andhakar aatcalar modhye tahar aapis; adure ekti panapukur ebang tahat cari pare jangal*" (Galpa Samagra, P. 51). The postmaster could not adjust with the environment. In spite of greenery everywhere in his surrounding, he imagined to his metropolitan residence.

Again the seasonal change of nature also reflected in this story. It was presented in the sense of having negative impact on the postmaster's health. It is reveal in the story when the postmaster blamed the natural weather of Ulapur after falling ill due to the continuous rain. Here also nature stands as a means to disconnect him from Ulapur. At the climax of the story, nature plays the critical role while explaining the suffering heart of the orphan girl Ratan. At one moment the postmaster thought about to go back and bring away Ratan with him. But the wind had just filled the sails, the boat had got well into the middle of the turbulent current, and already the village was left behind, and its outing burning ground came in sight. Here, the combination of the *turbulent current* of the river and his *own powers of rationalization* helped the postmaster to overcome his momentary feeling of pain in his actions towards Ratan.

This is accented with the swift flowing river that continuous on, regardless of human affairs. The nature in the form of river is presented here as an entity which is continuously doing her work in a disciplined way without looking for anyone's interferences'. Tagore states thus:

Jakhan noukai uthilen.....takhan hridayer modhye atyanta ekta bedana anubhav karite lagilen.... ekta samanya balikar karun mukhachhabi jen ek bishwabyapi brihat abyakta marma byatha prakash korite lagila. Ekbar nitanta echha hoila "firiya jai, jagater krorbichyuta sei anathinike sange korla loiya aasi".....kintu takhan pale batas paiyache, barshar srot khartar bege bahiteche, gram atikram kariya nadikuler shmashan dekha diyache. Ebong nadi prabahe bhasaman pathiker udas hridaye ei tattver uday hoila, jibane eman kota bichched, kata mrityu ache, firiya fal ki. Prithibite ke kahara (Galpa Samagra, P. 57)

The postmaster uses nature as a way to enhance a justification for his taken decisions. He used nature as a means to forget or deny the mistakes he committed. The postmaster ended up using nature, the same force that troubled him so much in Ulapur, as a means to make him feel better about his actions. In this, the reader sees an added significance to nature in the text.

The story *Subha* was written by Tagore in 1892. It is the story of a village dumb girl named after Subha. In this story, nature is reflected in the true sense of the term. Here, nature is presented as a dumb fellow who cannot speak or express feelings through the help of languages. Still it has her language in the form of murmur and different movements. It remains the good companion of the regretted fellow. In this story river as a part of nature, remained as a friendly abode to share the feelings of the dumb girl. Tagore expressed thus, "kajkorme jokhonoi absar pai tokhonoi se ei noditire aasiya bose" (Galpa Samagra, P. 237).

Nature is presented in this story as a means to fulfill her dumbness by speaking to her. She never treated her as a dumb while sitting near the river, hearing different sounds the surrounding environment. Tagore also states thus:

Prakriti jen tahar bhasar abhav puron koriya deya. Jen tahar hoiya kotha koy. Nodir kolodhbani, loker kolahol, majhir gan, pakhir dak, tarur mormor, samasta mishiya cari diker colaphera aandolan- komponer sohit ek hoiya, samudrer tarangorashir nyay, , balikar cironistabdhothridoy upokuler nikote aasiya bhangiya pore. Prakritir ei bibidh shabda ebong bicitra goti, ehao bobar bhasa---- baro baro cakshupollobbishista subhar j-bhasa taharoi ekta bishwabyapi bistar; jhillirobopurna trinabhami hoite shabdatit nakshatro lok porjonto keval engit, bhongi, sangit, krondon ebong dirgho nishwas (Galpa Samagra, P. 238).

Thus, in this story nature is presented as a real companion of the dumb girl Subha from the beginning till the end. In this story the surrounding natural environment is beautifully presented. Man nature relationship also clearly reveals in this story. Here also nature is presented as a continuous disciplined process following its own laws. Tagore had drawn the picture in the following way:

gamer nam chandipura. Naditi bangladesher ekta choto nadi,niralasa tanvi naditi apon kulroksha kariya kaj kariya jai; dui dharer gamer sakalerai sange tahar jen ekta na ekta samparka ache. Dui dhare lokalay ebong taruchchayaghan uccatat; nimnatal diya gramlakshmi srotasvini atmbismrita druta padakshepe prafullahridaye apnar asangkha kalyankarye caliache (Galpa Samagra, P. 237)

The story *Chuti* was written by Tagore in between 1892-93. Chuti is the reflection of his realization of companion of nature for the proper development of a child. In this story nature is reflected as a source of joy, a true companion from beginning till the end. Here also river plays the significant role. The story start with a tale of a boy named after Phatik who was nursed and groomed in the lapse of nature. He spent maximum of his time enthusiastically at the river side, under the open sky. But after coming to Calcutta he had to spend his time within the boundary walls like a prisoner. He had to follow strict rules at home as well as at school, without any entertainment or entertainer. There was no river to jump into and swim. He totally annoyed with city and busy life. His internal urge for the nature's lap, his mother's lap provoked him to take risk of his life to left Calcutta during the heavy rain. Tagore expressed Phatik's reaction in the following manners:

Gharer modhye airup onadar, ehar por aabar hanf chadibar jayga chila na. Deyaler modhye aatka poriya keboloi tahar sei gamer kotha monot porita.....prokanda ekta dhaus ghuri loiya bo bo shabde uraiya bedaibar sei math, 'taire naire naire na' koriya ucceisware swarocita ragini aalap korla, akornyabhabeghuriya beraibar sei noditir, diner modhye johon tokhon jhap diya poriya satar katibar sei sankirno srotaswini, sei sob dol bol, upadrob, swadhinota abong sarbopori sei atyacarini obicarini mahornishi tahar nirupay cittoke aakorshon korita (Galpa Samagra, P. 232).

In the story *Atithi*, written Tagore in 1895, also nature is reflected in a significant way. In this story also river plays a significant role. Tagore placed nature in a symbolic manner through the help of a teenage restless boy. The story started with narrating a teenage restless boy named after Tarapad who never wanted to stay in a place permanently.

Tarapad was called by nature and so he left home to stay in the lap of nature. In this story Tarapad's restlessness has been presented through the recurrent image of movement and the recurrent image of sound. Nature is presented here as an assistance of molding life style of people. Nature is reflected here as a source of joy and happiness to mankind through the help of the central character Tarapad. He had a deep attachment to nature and the natural things. His happiness and pleasure lies in the natural activities; these are voice of the kites, foxes, sound of the clouds and the tune of the raindrops falling on leaves. Tagore beautifully presented in the story *Atithi* thus:

Gaser ghon pollober opor jokhon shraboner bristidhara porita, akashe megh dakita, oronyer bhitro matrihin doitya shishur nyay batas krondon korite thakita, tokhon tahar citta jen uchringkhola hoiya uthita. Nistabdha dviprohore bohudur akash hoite ciler dak, borsar sondhyay bheker kolorob, gobhir ratre shrigaler citkar dhvoni sokoloi tahake utola korita (Galpa Samagra, page. 516).

He is the child of nature and nature played the role of a nurturer from beginning to end. In this story a real picture of natural world and the changes of different seasons also beautifully reflected. Man nature relationship also presented here in the true sense of the term. Tagore presented in the following way:

Akashe nababarshar megh uthila.....kotha hoite drutagamini jaldhara kalhasyahakare gramer shunyaksho aasia samagata hoila.....shuska nirjiba gramer modhye kotha hoite ek prabal bipul pranhillol aasia prabesh korila.....samastoi sasal sajak hoiya uthe.....(Galpa Samagra, Pp. 531.32).

Thus in the above mentioned stories Tagore, the reflection of nature is clearly reveal in the true sense of the term. In all of these four nature related stories, Tagore nature presented nature in diverse ways. Sometimes nature has drawn as a challenging entity to mankind, sometimes a dependable source where mankind find shelter, as a safety place to take rest, as a true companion, a nurturer, and as a teacher of lives' lesson so on and so forth. Being the nature poet we find the lyrical touch in these stories. As a poet of nature he could feel the pulse of nature and it is also reveal in these stories. So, the short stories of Tagore also through a flash of light on nature with a new identity as well a new significance of the worth of existence.

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